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CIA, Dayan deny pro-Arab charge on sinking U.S. ship

By Joseph Polakoff

A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency this week that the American Palestine Committee withheld information in its possession that was "considerably at variance" with the accusations it levelled against Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan in an advertisement published this morning in the New York Times.

The pro-Arab group charged that Dayan, then-Israel's Defense Minister, had personally ordered the Israeli air attack on June 8, 1967, although he was aware it was an American ship.

The committee said its charges were based on three CIA documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. Denis Berend, deputy press chief of the CIA, told the JTA, however, that attorneys for the committee had received four documents from the CIA but cited only three of them. Those documents, he said were "unfinished, unevaluated, raw intelligence." He described the fourth, unused, document as "more finished intelligence" that "actually was an accounting of what transpired in the attack" and was "considerably at variance" with the other three.

Although the ad claimed that the American Palestine Committee had "just received" the documents, Berend told the JTA that the first three were given to the group's lawyers last July and the fourth was released to them three weeks ago. He could not say exactly when the documents were requested.

The allegations were brushed aside by CIA director Admiral Stanfield Turner and Dayan. Turner, appearing on the ABC television program "Good Morning America," said the Liberty incident was an action of the Six Day War that was not malicious and was satisfactorily explained by Israel.

Dayan, who spoke to reporters in the presence of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance just prior to their meeting at the State Department Monday morning, told the JTA that Israel had not known the Liberty was an American ship. "We were at war," he said, and the attack was a mistake by the Israeli Air Force. "We not only apologized," but agreed to indemnify the U.S. for the damage, Dayan said.

The American Palestine Committee ad was apparently an attempt to embarrass Dayan and his government at the start of a new round of diplomatic talks aimed at reconvening the Geneva Conference.

The ad in the Times, under the headline, "Are we welcoming the murderer of our sons?" quoted CIA documents that identified the Turkish military attache in Tel Aviv as the source of charges that Israel knowingly attacked an American ship, killing 34 crewmen and injuring 164. The documents imply that Dayan ordered the attack because the Liberty's electronic equipment was jamming Israeli military communications and intercepting Israeli intelligence.

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